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A Screwball Outfit

The mysterious John Birch Society has made all the newspapers this spring. It has been denounced (and even defended) on the floor of congress. It has become "a matter of concern" to the attorney general.

Complaints that it is un-American brought from the house un-American activities committee a guarded statement that complainers could have recourse to the civil courts. Complaints brought from Senator James Eastland (Dem., Miss.) the utterly unguarded statement (as head of the senate internal security subcommittee) that "we are happy to state it seems to be a patriotic organization."

This is a weird assessment of an outfit whose founder and one-man boss called former Presidents Eisenhower, Truman, Franklin Roosevelt, and Central Intelligence Chief Allen Dulles and Chief Justice Earl Warren tools of the Communists. All this also is a lot of attention to pay to a screwball club which is devoted to "fighting Communism" with such distorted vision.

But the John Birch Society seems to

appeal to a certain number of embittered conservatives who think the United States has been going "socialist" since 1933, or maybe 1912, and that Communist infiltration of American society is responsible.

The founder, Robert Welch, is a retired Boston candy manufacturer. In Wichita a year ago the society recruited enough fellow spirits (some of them respected industrialists) to make life miserable for Wichita University, the social science teachers of the Wichita public schools, and for the long-established annual institute on world affairs jointly sponsored by the members of the three "peace" churches (Friends, Brethren and Mennonites) and the American Friends Service Committee.

The John Birch Society gains what strength it has by using Communist methods: secrecy, party cells, party discipline, smears and intimidation.

The conservative Los Angeles Times calls the John Birch society approach "subversion of the right," a "peril to conservatives," wrong in principle, dangerous in practice. We call it ridiculous.